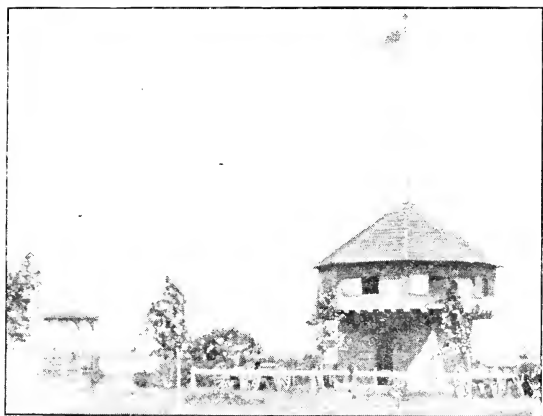


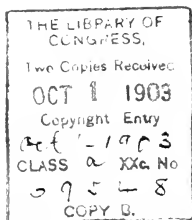
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Sketches
of
Fort Presque Isle.

By

Winifred Sackville-Stoner.



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To My Little Friends,
Gertrude Montgomery
and
Richard Montgomery,
of Erie, Pa.

FORT PRESQUE ISLE—PAST AND PRESENT.

The ground upon which Presque Isle Block House stands has been the scene of many stirring events in the history of this country. Here, in 1653, the Erie tribe of Indians fought their last battle with the Iroquois, who having secured fire-arms from the Dutch traders, succeeded in wiping the weaker tribe out of existence.

The Chevalier De LaSalle was the first white man to set foot upon this soil which he claimed for France in 1679, but almost three quarters of a century passed before the French made any attempt to hold their claim. A fort was then built (1753) by order of Marquis DuQuesne, Governor of Canada, who sent out three hundred men to establish military posts for the protection of the Ohio valley against the ever encroaching English.

The first fortifications built consisted of four rough block houses within a log stockade, and as the land at this point was in the shape of a peninsula, the fort was appropriately named Presque Isle.

In 1760, after a bloody siege of two days, the English, assisted by the Indians, who set fire to these fortifications no less than fifty times, succeeded in capturing this stronghold, but there is only one authentic record of their occupying their hard gained possession. This was in 1764, when General Bradstreet made a treaty with the Delawares and Shawnees.

The fort was then abandoned and there was no further mention made of it until 1794, when it was repaired by General Wayne, (known as "Mad Anthony" on account of his daring in battle) who had led the attack at Germantown and had won the admiration of both friends and enemies by capturing Stony Point, one of the strongest British possessions on the Hudson.

In this year he was appointed Major General of the American army and having been sent on an expedition against the Miami Indians, he used Fort Presque Isle as his headquarters.

After forcing his red brothers to sue for peace, he made a treaty with them in 1795 at Greenville, Ohio, and in the following year sailed from Detroit for Presque Isle. While

on the way he was seized with a severe attack of acute gout and as there were no remedies on ship-board, when he arrived at his destination he was in a dying condition and succumbed to his long-time enemy on December 15th, 1796, at the age of fifty-two years.

At his request he was dressed in his uniform and boots and buried in a plain coffin at the foot of the block-house flag-staff. Here his body rested until 1809 when his daughter, Mrs. Atlee, of Chester County, Pennsylvania, became seriously ill and feeling that she was about to die, expressed a wish that her father's bones might be disinterred and re-buried in the family burial ground. Her brother, Col. Issac Wayne, wishing to grant this dying request, drove in a sulky across the state of Pennsylvania, which was then a wilderness, and on arriving at Presque Isle employed Dr. Wallace to superintend the disinterment. But when the grave was opened instead of finding, as they expected, only a few bones, they were surprised to discover the entire body excepting the diseased leg in a petrified state.

As it was impossible to carry the body in this condition across the wilderness, Dr.

Wallace boiled the remains in an immense kettle, carefully scraped the bones and placed them in a small box which Col. Wayne carried home with him and buried in St. David's Episcopal churchyard at Radnor, Delaware County, about 14 miles from Philadelphia and not far from Paoli, the scene of the massacre which General Wayne avenged at Stony Point.

The other remains and the implements used in cleaning the bones were placed in their former receptacle and re-buried.

The kettle was preserved and is now on exhibition in the museum of the Erie Public Library.

In the war of 1812 the old block-house was used as a rendezvous camp for the soldiers who were expected to attack the British should Perry be defeated. It was during this war that James Byrd was shot as a deserter when returning from a visit to his sweetheart, who lived near Dunkirk, N. Y. Byrd had overstayed his leave of absence and was hastening back to his ship, which was anchored in the bay near the block-house, when the men who had been sent out to search for him, met him only a few yards from the ship and fired

without allowing time for a word of explanation. This pathetic incident furnished material for a beautiful poem which is familiar to all the old residents of Erie.

Although the block-house was burned to the ground by some miserable vandals in 1853, its site was easily traceable until 1863 and during the civil war some of the home guard camped there.

Following this war for some years the historic spot was almost forgotten until 1878, when the health officer of Erie, the late Dr. Germer, who was an ardent admirer of General Wayne, after making careful investigations, discovered the site of the old block-house and the grave of "Mad" Anthony Wayne was once more disturbed.

The coffin lid and the knives used by Dr. Wallace were found in a fair state of preservation. These were placed in a glass case and hung on the wall of a new block-house, which was built with funds appropriated by the state legislature through the efforts of Dr. Germer and Capt. Welsh.

This block-house (built in 1880) is supposed to be a correct imitation of its historic prede-

cessor and shelters General Wayne's now empty grave, which has been built up with stone and marked with its original inscription.

A Marine Hospital was also built on these grounds, but as it proved useless for this purpose it was finally decided to make it into a home for disabled soldiers and sailors, and no more appropriate monument could have been raised in honor of brave "Mad" Anthony Wayne, whose ashes or at least a part of them, now rest where his heart ever belonged, near to the soldiers and sailors who fought for this glorious republic.



THE PHANTOMS OF FORT PRESQUE ISLE.

Gertrude Montgomery was the only daughter of old fashioned common-place country parents and the sister of five ordinary rough-and-tumble brothers, but she was not of the "old fashioned girl" type, nor was she like other girls of her day.

Gertrude, the dreamer, she might well have been called, for from earliest childhood days she found her greatest pleasure in sitting in quiet nooks by herself or in relating to her little friends dreams, which she claimed to be scenes in real life and which she conscientiously believed to be even as she described them.

To her parents she was an enigma, and as they were of the self-righteous order, who have no toleration for sinners, they were often horrified to hear their only daughter telling tales which they felt were without foundation. Therefore they considered it their Christian duty to punish Gertrude for these falsehoods, and as she was a child of imagination and had faith in her dreams, she could not understand why she should be punished and naturally feared and disliked her parents.

Her brothers, like other ordinary rude boys, thought that a little girl was of no use around

the house excepting to tease in the old-time ways so dear to the youthful masculine heart, which takes pleasure in making a small sister's back the receptacle for toads, bugs, and other noxious things, and considers dolls useful only to be scalped.

As the little dreamer found no sympathy among her home people she sought the woods and flowers for her companions in summer and a few well thumbed books served for her only amusement in winter, and thus she passed the first sixteen years of her life.

At this time all of her brothers had gone from home and she often surprised her mother by describing what they were doing at certain times, claiming that she had seen them in her dreams, and shortly after letters would come to verify her statements.

Mrs. Montgomery told some of the neighbors about her daughter's strange gift and they laughed at such nonsense. But when Dr. Cresswell, an eccentric old Englishman who spent most of his time in pouring over musty books, heard of Gertrude's dreams he became very much interested and on his first visit to her she felt that at last she was understood. The doctor saw that, as a delicate blossom gives up all its strength in distilling fragrant perfume,

so this young girl's mind was cultivated at the expense of her body and she dwelt more in the realms of far away thought than in the cold world of reality.

This eccentric old gentleman surprised his neighbors by declaring Gertrude Montgomery to be superior to all those who laughed her to scorn. He claimed that she was one of those few persons of delicate and over developed sentient nerves, who feel both pleasure and pain more keenly than mortals of commoner clay and at times can even separate their spirits from the burden of their earthly bodies and visit (in spirit) those in whom they are interested.

As a proof of his statement he cited many authentic incidents, quoted by reliable writers, of mothers who, while on their death beds, possessed an intense longing to see their beloved children and by some unknown power were able to appear before them, and likewise accounts of sons and daughters who had shown themselves to their absent parents, and lovers to their sweethearts. Of course the ignorant people ridiculed these tales, but the kind old doctor ignored their taunts and spent much of his time in reading upon psychological subjects with the so-called "queer" Gertrude.

Time passed on and Gertrude grew into young womanhood. Then the second war with England broke out and her youngest brother enlisted in the U. S. Navy. Sitting by the fireside in the long evenings she could see him at his various posts and on several occasions when he was in danger she saw that his life was saved by a friend who was always near his side.

As Christmas time drew near she dreamed that this brother (Charlie) was coming home and would bring his friend with him and in a few days her mother received the letter which she knew would come with the same news.

Young Montgomery and his chum arrived at the old homestead on a dark stormy night and as handsome, dashing James Byrd came in reach of the bright rays from the fire-light, Gertrude knew that she had met the friend of her dreams—and her fate. Love came to both these young people on their first meeting and within three days they were bethrothed.

For the first time in her life Gertrude felt the joy of loving and of being loved, but her happiness was of short duration for she was soon parted from her lover, who had to return to his post of danger.

And now her dreams came faster and were

more vivid than before, as her heart followed her loved one and she knew what happened to him each day even before his letters told her the same story.

Thus the winter passed by and the summer came with all its glory and on a beautiful night as she sat by her bed room window, she saw her beloved approaching her and felt the joy of a lover's kiss. Then all was changed—he was hastening away from her—returning to his ship—there was some mistake—some dreadful mistake—the sound of firing and a pale still face upturned to the cold rays of the moon.

As all mortals are prone to try and forget sorrow, so Gertrude tried to laugh at this horrible dream; but experience had taught her to have faith in her visions and she thought that this dream had been sent to forewarn her lover of some danger. Hastily she wrote him a brief note telling him that even if he should be near by he must not come to visit her, and although it was midnight she crept noiselessly down stairs and out to the stable where she saddled a horse and rode to the postoffice, five miles away, so as to send her all important message without delay.

Then she returned to her lonely room, but could not sleep as the horror of this dream

was upon her, and when early on the following morning she heard the voice of her brother Charlie she knew that her vision was true and James Byrd could not be far away. Running down stairs she threw her arms around her brother's neck and begged him to ride hard and fast back to the ship and tell Jim not to come and see her.

"Talk about silly girls," impatiently exclaimed her brother, "you are the silliest. I thought I was bringing you a nice bit of news as Jim has a day's leave of absence and is now on the road to see you, but for some insane reason you don't want to see him."

Disregarding his taunts the poor girl fell on her knees and pleaded with him to grant her request as Jim's life was in danger, but he only laughed, and finding him obdurate she mounted his horse and rode out to meet her lover. The two lovers met only a few miles from her home and Byrd was greatly surprised to see Gertrude but more astonished when she threw her arms about his neck and implored him to return at once or he would be shot.

He tried to quiet her fears and laughed at the vision she had seen, but she would not be calmed, and after repeated and frantic appeals for him to leave her, she fell in a senseless

heap at his feet. Then it was James Byrd's turn to grow wild with apprehension. He, who had no fear of the battle, felt terror-stricken as he held the pale form of his loved one in his arms, and having tried in vain to restore her to consciousness, he put her on his horse and brought her home. The doctor was summoned and after a time succeeded in arousing the unconscious girl, but as soon as she saw her lover she became almost delirious and frantically begged him to leave her. In anxiety for her he even forgot his duty and was only aroused to a realization of his rashness by a whispered warning from Charlie that it was now eight o'clock, the hour when he should be on shipboard, ready to report for duty.

Kissing his loved one good-bye, he sprang on his horse and rode in hot haste towards his ship, which was anchored some thirty miles away, near the old Presque Isle block-house. The last two miles, however, he was compelled to make on foot as he had borrowed the horse he rode from a farmer and was pledged to return it that night.

Therefore it was almost midnight when the lights of the ship were plainly in sight, and what a relief to see the ship so close and to

feel assured that he could relieve his darling's mind on the morrow by sending a message telling of his safe return. And although he knew that he had disobeyed orders and would be reprimanded, yet he felt certain that when his Captain, who had a kind heart, should know the cause of his tardiness, he would make his punishment light.

With these hopes to buoy up his spirits he quickened his pace almost into a run and was within a few yards of his goal when suddenly a posse of men surrounded him on all sides and before he could utter a word several shots were fired in quick succession and James Byrd fell dead—shot as a deserter—his pale face upturned to the cold rays of the silent moon even as his sweetheart had foreseen.

As his spirit passed to the world beyond, Gertrude knew that the time had come to join her beloved one and she crossed the dark waters to that land where loving souls meet to part no more.

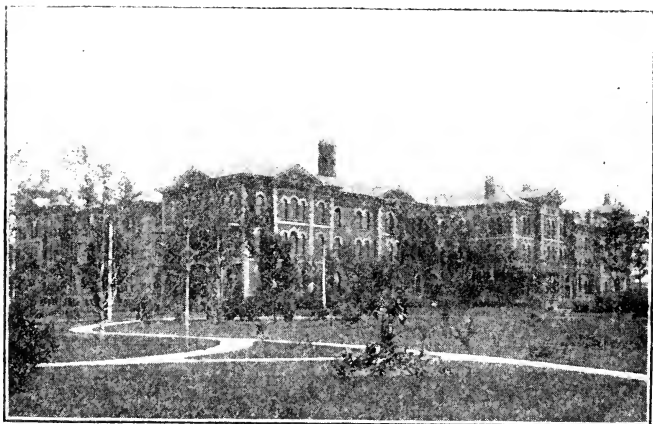
The spot where Byrd fell, now marked by a clump of bushes, is often pointed out by the inmates of the "Soldiers and Sailors Home", and some of these old veterans claim that on clear moonlight nights they can see the forms of a sailor lad and a slender maiden walking hand in hand.

Others make sport of such tales, but whether or not the spirits of these two unfortunate lovers are permitted to wander together upon earth we feel that they must be united somewhere.

Mortals often murmur against that which seems an injustice when one who has ever lived uprightly is deprived of every comfort and joy, knowing naught but pain and sorrow, while another who defies all laws of God and Nature, enjoys health and all of earth's pleasures.

Why should this be? Where is God's justice? Man does not know but he feels assured that the just and merciful Father of this universe is kind to all of his children and to those who are deprived of earthly joy he gives a greater capacity for enjoyment in the world to come.

In that world, we are told, there is no marrying or giving in marriage but those who have loved each other upon earth with a pure heart-to-heart, soul-to-soul love, will surely be united in that spiritual bond of love which can never be served and which gives far greater peace and comfort than earthly love can know.



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